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EDITORIALS

PORTLAND ADDRESSES OF THE THREE A. M. A. PRESIDENTS

At the recent Portland meeting of the American Medical Association, Retiring President Dr. W. S. Thayer of Baltimore, President M. L. Harris of Chicago, and President-elect William Gerry Morgan of Washington, D. C., made formal or informal addresses which were of considerable interest to members of the national association, and presumably also to the local newspapers and national press bureaus.

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Doctor Thayer's Remarks on Tolerance and Temperance.—It must have been somewhat of a shock to many who had only casually met Doctor Thayer to have heard his American Medical Association address. For he impresses most persons as he is remembered, for instance, by many California Medical Association members who were present with him at the San Diego session, as being an able colleague of unusually gentle and kindly thought and bearing. In a somewhat short address on the work of the American Medical Association he stated, among other things, the following:

Here in America we have gone along . . . with a government by the majority tempered by safeguards, all owing a fair measure of local independence. On this model has been formed the constitution of the American Medical Association. Government by the

majority is wholesome and beneficent so long as it is tolerant and considerate. . . . But there are lengths beyond which a majority may not go. When in a country like ours the national government attempts to legislate for the whole country as to what we may or may not eat or drink, or how we may dress, as to our religious beliefs, or what we may or may not read, this is to interfere with rights that are sacred to every English-speaking man. This is no longer republican government; it is tyranny. . . . As a nation, we have of recent years set a rather sorry example in the passage of inconsiderate, ill-considered and intolerant prescriptions and prohibitions; prescriptions and prohibitions some of which may be proper enough in certain localities where they represent the desire of the majority, but which, when applied to the country at large, interfere with the personal liberties of the people. Such laws cannot be enforced; they defeat their own ends. Intolerance is the most fatal enemy of liberty. . . .

As was to be expected, thoughts such as the above promptly brought down upon Doctor Thayer an avalanche of adverse criticism, and especially from a prominent salaried official of one of the prohibition organizations. A Portland newspaper played up these comments, and the press agencies sent out dispatches on what seemed to be a good controversial news item. Which it was, but which, after all, made it possible for Doctor Thayer's remarks to reach a larger national audience.

In passing, it may be stated that Doctor Thayer's address was received with much applause by the House of Delegates of the American Medical Association and that when the subject was brought up at a later meeting of the House of Delegates its members again went on record as being practically unanimous in supporting the viewpoints brought forward by Doctor Thayer. The Reference Committee report on the address, which was adopted by the House of Delegates, reads as follows:

The committee especially commends and endorses the sentiments expressed by President Thayer concerning legislative enactments that are inimical to the best interests of the medical profession and public, by restricting medical men as to what shall and what shall not be prescribed for the relief of human ills. It does, however, recognize the wisdom of the advice of President Thayer to the effect that these questions should be considered by this House of Delegates in a spirit of temperance and good judgment, and with proper respect for our traditions.

* * *

If some of the somewhat intemperate advocates of the supposed temperance, which is known as prohibition, would but heed Doctor Thayer's advice, more progress for all concerned probably would be the good result, and the best interests of our country and people, and also of modern-day civilization would be better served.

Suggestions of President M. L. Harris on the Cost of Medical Care.—If the viewpoints of Doctor Thayer met with outright and caustic criticism from some laymen, the recommendation of the incoming president, Dr. M. L. Harris of Chicago, on a means of solving some of the problems incident to the cost of medical care may be said to have also met with some opposition; only